

# Practising Archaeology — As if it Really Matters

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People care about archaeology for a variety of competing reasons. Archaeologists no longer ignore this as they once did, but few have come to terms on a pragmatic level with their responsibility to the public. Here I outline my own ideas about public engagement and the place of ethnography in the archaeologist's professional practice. While long-term collaborations between archaeologists and others are almost always preferable, they are rarely feasible, and lofty ideals can have negative repercussions for daily practice and political action. I advocate Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a method that archaeologists untrained in ethnography can use to expediently develop ethnographically sensitive and respectful relationships. I also advocate that archaeologists be honest about what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how it relates to what they are actually trained to do. This is an important step since archaeologists need to be able to see themselves as one group of stakeholders with a right to advocate their position, but no right to ultimate control of the resources that they use to create an archaeological record. PAR is structured to ensure that project outcomes are not determined in advance. This means that the perspectives and objectives of archaeologists, even when they are allied with political and economic power, will not always prevail. I conclude with a description of a current community museums project I am supporting in Kyrgyzstan where I have put as much energy into transparency as into ethnography.

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## First principles

I base my work on several preconceptions. First, all fieldwork, whether it is archaeology or palaeontology or geology or something else, has an impact on living people. The degree of the effect is related to various factors including the mere presence of the researcher as an outsider, or at least as someone with a defined agenda, the

attention the research draws to the local area, and the political implications of the interpretations the researcher makes. These include biologists who identify endangered species, geologists who predict volcanic eruptions and archaeologists who find gold, evidence of ancient human cruelty and attractive tourist destinations. The repercussions of the research can be positive, negative or neutral but most of the time any research programme has some positive, some negative and some neutral effects all at the same time. This does not mean that no one should do fieldwork. It is important to know when animal species are in danger of extinction, when volcanoes are likely to erupt, and what people accomplished in the past. But it is also important not to overstate the strength of our inferences with no attention to the cultural context of our work. Intellectual freedom is not the freedom to needlessly disrupt economic growth with exaggerated environmental impact assessments or to frighten people into unnecessarily abandoning their homes by publicizing a geological event with an insignificant statistical probability of occurrence. And similarly, archaeologists have to be careful not to inspire looting by inspiring public visions of treasure, or genocide by providing a pedigree for hatred with simplistic consumer-oriented interpretations of a complex past. The current fad of constructing certain cultural transitions as 'collapse' is ripe for socio-political analysis. The delicate issue is how to educate but at the same time allow non-specialists to have some control over the impact of archaeological research. This has to be worked out in each context and the balance will not always be the same.

Second, even with attention to local context and appropriate humility about the reach of science, the field researcher has a limited ability to control the repercussions of her work. It is a scholarly truism that research done with the best of intentions, or at least with no consciously wicked motives, can be used to justify evil and to construct the machines of war. This does not mean that the researcher should make no attempt to foresee and mitigate negative results stemming from her scholarly efforts. It does mean that some sorts of research should be avoided in certain times and in certain places, and that methodologies and procedures should place immediate and local repercussions above abstract principles such as 'the good of all human beings' or 'science' writ large, or even 'peace' and 'justice'.

This is because, as Jackson has pointed out, although it is possible, as Margaret Mead so famously argued, for a small group of people to change the world, it is not possible for them to control the change (Jackson 2006: 22–39). Revolutionaries and radicals, but also state committees and political groups with a less overtly violent agenda, that are willing to use any means to alter history have done so, but the results were never what they foresaw, much less what they desired. Human systems are simply too complex to be shaped by allegiance to transcendent principles, but most destructive political violence can be traced to just such an allegiance. It is also a scholarly truism that intellectual freedom entails a certain amount of intellectual responsibility. Responsible research, including field research, has primarily to be evaluated on a human scale.

I am presently involved in a community museums project in Kyrgyzstan where I have limited ethnographic knowledge and no professional standing. This situation has prompted me to rely heavily on local archaeologists and other local people. The need for humility on my part could not be more obvious. It has allowed me to be very clear about the limits of my expertise and under the conditions of a post-Soviet

country it has actually saved me from being pushed into a leading role which I do not desire and to maintain expectations on a reasonable level.

Third, all scholars are products of culture, history and individual experience. Their interests and ability to see problems and envision solutions or explanations are embedded in their own contexts, which are personal, local, and global at the same time. This does not mean that they are absolved of trying to be objective. In fact, what it means to be a social scientist, as opposed to a palaeontologist or a geologist, is that part of the intellectual work lies in attempting to see and take into account the frames of reference that circumscribe research agendas and findings. Fieldwork in the social sciences is reflexive by definition and this is a strength not a weakness. But the point of this reflexivity is to strengthen intersubjectivity and our ability to communicate across cultural boundaries, and while responsible social science entails respect for alternative perspectives and the possibility of incommensurable values, such disagreements do not preclude engagement. On the contrary, they require it. The tricky issue for my project in Kyrgyzstan is to try to persuade people with various perspectives to be reflexive about their interest in archaeology.

Fourth, despite the cultural frames that circumscribe any human view, research on people has resulted in the production of information that is both interesting and useful. To behave as if only colonialists have an interest in scientific knowledge or that to take a scientific approach is to attempt to dominate all other world views or that scientific reasoning is the province only of Western cultures is a Western conceit (Pyburn, 1999). All people put value on objectivity in certain contexts, and certain forms of science have resulted in intellectual and mechanical technologies that make human lives demonstrably better and longer. No one should have such technologies rejected on their behalf any more than they should be forced to use them or to accept their use without question. But people faced with such choices should be given access to the information they need to make informed decisions. When people are intellectually but not economically or politically insulated from the world system, outsiders can conveniently elide poverty and privation with 'tradition'.

Some of these useful technologies are the province of social science. That is, as a result of many years of research (including some shameful flailing around with racist assumptions), researchers in particular sciences have accumulated information that people can put to use for good causes. Not all the information is conclusive or even reliable, but accepting the educational investment, research support and position of authority that is given to scientists in most parts of the world entails sharing what we think we know and what we think we do not know with other people, including non-scientists. It also requires us to think very carefully about how we use the public trust and the scarce resources we control.

In fact, archaeologists control a very small amount of the resources offered to scientists and other academics. Even in wealthy nations, archaeologists' salaries and grants are usually demonstrably lower than those of professors of business or chemistry or astronomy (Zeder, 1997; Pyburn, 1999). Research funding mostly comes through government efforts to rescue endangered sites. It is interesting that so much anger has been directed at archaeologists for their political insensitivity, since their ability to wreak havoc is so modest in comparison with medical research or the pronouncements of economists and political scientists. It is ironic that the susceptibility

of archaeologists to such criticism is partly because their low status in the academy leaves them more vulnerable than their more dangerous colleagues. It is even more ironic to note that any fair evaluation of the current literature shows that archaeologists practising today, even those deemed politically irresponsible, actually care a great deal more about oppressed minorities and disenfranchised indigenous people than almost any other academic specialist. A serious consideration of who benefits most from negative relations between archaeologists and local or indigenous people seems warranted.

## Embodied archaeology

The upshot of these ideas, which are not at all unique to me, is that archaeology makes an obvious difference to many people and has the potential to impact many more. The question is whether archaeologists should be as politically passive as possible and attempt to restrict, mitigate or conceal their research, or actively wield investigation and knowledge of the past for a good cause. Both modernist and post-modernist views can be used to encourage a mitigating approach, albeit for different reasons. For strict constructionist processualists, the belief lingers that it is possible to do apolitical archaeology and that active engagement with living people interferes with the objectivity of science. For hyper-relativist postprocessualists the idea of attempting to help someone else is inherently hegemonic and the unknowability of other cultures mandates a Star Trek-like 'prime directive' not to interfere.

The extreme processualist perspective is simply empirically wrong. Archaeologists are not passive, we are actively engaged in a political project; the only question is whether or not we realize it. Data demonstrating this are now overwhelming for all the sciences, but especially for the social sciences. Acknowledging this is tantamount to recognizing sources of bias in a statistical sample, which is an exercise no scientist would rule out as too political.

The extreme postprocessualist perspective is also empirically wrong. If anyone really believed intersubjectivity was impossible there would be no point in doing anthropology at all, much less archaeology. But other cultures are knowable, not because of a great superorganic human commonality, but because of the basic organic commonality that human experience is embodied. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) marshal quite a bit of evidence to show that most human reasoning is subconscious and although formulated in response to environmental and cultural context, is nevertheless limited by the realities of human physiology. And further, they propose that one of the major functions of consciousness, perhaps the crucial one for human organization, is the ability to empathize with other creatures, especially other humans.

This perspective is demonstrated by brain imaging which shows that the same areas of the brain light up when you pick up an apple as when you watch someone else pick up an apple (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999: 93). When an excavation at the Maya site of Chau Hiix uncovered a stingray spine penis perforator placed between the femora of a male interment, every male in the crew who observed the find winced and moved his hand over his crotch. There is no simple subject-object dilemma, the subject and the object are the same in the human mind, because it is itself embodied.

But the repercussions of embodiment go far beyond immediate physiological empathy to affect all aspects of human experience, and although the categories people use to organize perception are cultural, they are founded on a limiting biological substrate. Most female observers of the unpleasant stingray spine also winced and several reflexively placed a hand on the arm or shoulder of the nearest male. More broadly, people of cultures who do not kiss can, with effort, partially understand what it would be like to participate in a kissing culture. The degree of understanding is related to the amount of effort that is applied, but also to the quality of that effort.

In *Minima ethnographica* (1998: 195), Jackson argues that ‘Neither suffering nor reason confer superiority. One can only speak of a perennial struggle to affirm one’s right to live in a world one calls one’s own without invalidating the same right in others.’ This is the reason for ethnography and what sets it apart from the basic empathy and interpersonal generosity that make it possible. It is not simply immersion but conscious and critical immersion that advances cross-cultural understanding. And here, at last, I come to the key issue of this paper: the only excuse for doing archaeology is to work for a more democratic world, not in a grandiose sense motivated by a belief in abstract social justice, but at the interpersonal and community level where repercussions and results of humanistic endeavour for a small group of people can be seen and foreseen. And the only way to work for a more democratic world is to understand the relevant ethnographic frameworks of our work well enough to be able to situate research, both responsibly and provocatively.

## The archaeologist as ethnographer

From the foregoing it should be clear that I believe any fieldwork is most responsibly carried out in the context of ethnographic understanding of local and other relevant populations, and that such understanding requires a certain quantity and quality of effort. Appropriate ethnography for archaeologists is not about learning about other people or about teaching other people, but about *sharing* with other people. Attempts to ‘help’, ‘teach’, or evaluate other people without this effort, especially when the engagement is between wealthy, educated, government supported ‘scientists’ and people without such advantages, is every bit as hegemonic and colonialist as field programmes that make no attempt to engage non-specialists; perhaps more so. Even when the economic and cultural divide is less dramatic, as when professionals from wealthy nations engage with professionals from developing nations, or when professors evaluate the relative performance of students from different backgrounds, the potential for inappropriate condescension is quite high (see Holtorf, 2006).

Evidence for problems created by well-intentioned archaeologists without sufficient ethnographic knowledge is mounting. Many of these problems result from a commitment to abstract principles, such as economic development and ethnic pride, but not to the respect for the lives and needs of real individuals. While most archaeology-as-development projects no longer expect looters to lay down their shovels ‘for science’, it is not uncommon for promoters to expect people to embrace tourism as an economic panacea, and for economic improvement to follow naturally from instantiation of ‘ethnic pride’. But evidence for such problems is still largely anecdotal, as

few archaeologists have published what they frequently say ‘off the record’, which is that their efforts have gone unappreciated, that people have treated them with hostility and suspicion, and that the locals are too lazy to take up obvious opportunities and carry out the site upkeep required for preservation and successful tourism. And in many countries, archaeologists are beginning to notice that engagement with local communities is less likely to receive government approval than research programmes that purport to have no local impact. Archaeology that undermines or circumscribes ethnic history and promotes a view of the past as the conquest of barbarism is an attractive tool of the state, whereas grass roots bids for democratic improvements are likely to cause political trouble.

A failure to problematize the concept of a community is a major shortcoming of most community-based archaeology (Matsuda, 2004; Pyburn in press) stemming from a lack of ethnographic training on the part of the archaeologist. In fact community-based archaeology tends to make groups of people into communities whether or not such communities existed *a priori*. For better or worse ‘communitization’ often functions to promote globalization by defining a community in contemporary economic and political terms with little reference to history or even culture. In fact, most communities are contingent and flexible, and people usually belong to several. The consequences of ignoring or undermining this situation, e.g. the commoditization of local groups, need serious consideration and consultation with the people affected.

But archaeologists, even those with anthropological training, the training common in the United States, usually have a simplified idea about human organization and the functioning of communities, and also a simplified idea of what it means to do ethnography. It has been unfashionable among anthropologists for the last few decades to approach ethnography as a science, with the result that all sorts of people with all sorts of motives and no sort of training claim to be doing ethnography. Most of the present generation of archaeologists were trained by the cohort of archaeologists who invented ethnoarchaeology, which purported to produce ethnographic data relevant to archaeological interpretations from a field season as brief as three weeks’ duration. That this was sometimes deemed successful is less an indication of the prowess of ethnoarchaeology than evidence for the impoverished framework of archaeological interpretation.

## The possibility of useful knowledge

At the same time ethnoarchaeology and postmodern ethnography were flourishing in the academy, applied anthropology has been trundling along trying out ways of working with people and collecting data based on long-term reflexive experience of what works and what doesn’t. Recently, public anthropology has become prominent and some of the principles of ethical engagement have been ratified in the academy, including a new consensus that privilege entails responsibility (Sanday, 2003; Hemment, 2007); cross-cultural voyeurism is certainly a form of cultural imperialism. But it is impossible to be responsible to an abstract category of people, and even if aimless engagement eventually leads to genuine intersubjectivity, archaeologists, who have defined goals in working with living people, cannot wait passively for enlightenment to dawn.

Archaeologists are stakeholders, a term I use not despite its capitalist implications (as discussed by Hamilakis, 2007a) but because of them. Unless we maintain some measure of allegiance to the integrity of archaeological deposits, then we will have to stop calling ourselves archaeologists. Of course our allegiance has to be qualified and reflexive and take a back seat to other priorities, but archaeologists, insofar as they are archaeologists, place a value on a materialized past. And whether we like the idea that archaeologists contribute to the value-enhancing dance between the commoditization and singularization of the past (Kopytoff, 1986; Hamilakis, 2007b) or not, this is by definition what we do. Archaeologists, cultural elites who invest significant resources into finding, identifying, conserving, collecting, classifying and interpreting an archaeological record (albeit a record of many competing and contradictory people and events), are creating value that is indexed by material culture (and we also provide the chronological or historical or typological index) and simultaneously commodifies it. Archaeology is both a tool and a reflection of Western hegemony in the rise of the modern world system, and as such is necessarily deeply implicated in both the expansion and standard operation of capitalism.

It is certainly possible to see this allegiance as a bad thing. Archaeology is demonstrably a product of high colonialism which, at the very least, mandates the sort of reflexivity and humility I am advocating. I continue to be unsure about whether it is really possible to do archaeology ethically, no matter how post-colonial I want to be. Every artefact I remove from the dirt has a monetary as well as a political value, which influences how I conduct my research and comport myself in the public arenas, where I encounter people with competing stakes. And like many of my colleagues, I find myself doing less and less conventional archaeology and more and more other sorts of fieldwork.

This is not merely a semantic issue, since if we reject allegiance to the investigation, recovery, interpretation, and preservation of archaeological data, then we will have to stop claiming to be archaeologists. But if we reject the value of this expertise, then we will have to admit that although we are trained to do archaeology, we have abandoned it and taken up something else, which we are not trained to do. I prefer to be honest about where my expertise lies, open about the fact that my cultural background and education have given me a stake in something that I use as an archaeological record of the past. Changing the terms we use to reflect the ambivalence we feel about archaeology while still doing it, could be seen by the public as dishonest (Pyburn, 2003).

This goes back to the point discussed earlier about engagement and intersubjectivity. It is clear that there are many definitions of preservation, and that no one definition should be applied to all situations. Archaeologists who have expertise in the study and interpretation of ancient rock art have a stake in seeing rock art preserved and not covered up and permanently altered by contemporary repainting. Indigenous Australians see this sort of protection as waste, and prefer to preserve their traditions by continuing to use, and to repaint, their rock art. That the Aboriginal perspective is the more salient does not change the archaeological definition of preservation, nor does it mean that archaeologists have no stake in the preservation of rock art. It simply means that the archaeologists' perspective did not prevail, and most archaeologists agree that their interests in this case, as in many others, are not paramount.



But it would be disingenuous to try to claim that they had no stake or that the political context in which they practise did not position people with interests in the past and its materiality as stakeholders. Archaeologists can understand and agree with alternative perspectives, but that does not alter our heritage, nor does it make us ethnographers.

So if we are honest about our interests and cultural biases, meaning that archaeologists have at least some interest in preserving the resource that we use to train students, write books and challenge the status quo with evidence that the past was different, this means we have a different agenda from ethnographers. We may all agree that artefacts are less important than people, and that preservation, knowledge and respect for the past have vastly different definitions in different contexts. We may also agree that ethnography, economic development and the preservation of living people far outweigh the value of archaeology, without denying it has any value at all. The ethics charge of the American Anthropological Association is that an anthropologist's first priority is the people he or she is studying; the Society for American Archaeology places stewardship of the material record of the past first. Of course the World Archaeological Congress has a very different take on the responsibilities of archaeologists, but even though few archaeologists today would place artefacts above people, a commitment to the importance of the record of the human past makes it hard to be completely objective about competing interests. Most of the archaeologists I know who are concerned about ethical practice are concerned about how to 'educate' the public to agree with them, without the slightest consideration of the possibility that the archaeologists are the ones who need to be educated. Interaction between prominent scholars from wealthy communities and communities that are globally at an economic and political disadvantage that has been designed solely on the basis of the archaeologist's good intentions just won't suffice.

What this means is that there is something of a crisis emerging in archaeology, since archaeologists' need for ethnographic knowledge is increasingly noted, but the ability to acquire and process the needed information is limited by time, money, and training. In effect, quite a few archaeologists are attempting to do economic development projects or cultural recovery projects with no applied training and no local knowledge, beyond seat-of-the-pants attempts to promote 'preservation' and 'entrepreneurship'. This is the reason I have proposed the use of Participatory Action Research; it offers a defined, well-described but flexible methodology that obviates the worst mistakes well-meaning archaeologists make.

What archaeologists need to learn to do is not full-fledged academic ethnography that amounts to a second career, but something a bit more strategic and humble; in fact humility is the reason for doing Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Wadsworth, 1998), which is a method for constructing respectful and useful interaction and collaboration among interested or affected groups. In fact, the idea that research and development must be based on complete ethnographic knowledge is unrealistic and condescending. Even if it were possible for the ethnographer to know everything (and legendary ethnographers like Evans Pritchard and Malinowski researched the same people for many years without exhausting local knowledge), ordinary cultural development and change would immediately render that knowledge out of date.

Once upon a time archaeologists came into town with a government permit, paid local men to dig up artefacts and local women to wash them, drank heavily and swore



loudly in public bars, and then packed everything up and left without ever explaining anything to anyone, sometimes not even to their bewildered students. These days are not entirely over, but they probably soon will be. In the best of all possible worlds, every archaeologist would have the opportunity I had a few years ago when a prominent political figure visited the village in Belize where I have been living and working for 20 years. I was ushered by my friends into the receiving line with other people who have local responsibilities, and after they introduced themselves as ‘the village nurse’, the village school principal’, ‘the village chairman’ and ‘the village policeman’, I introduced myself as ‘the village archaeologist’ as if I was a normal part of village organization. I expected people to burst out laughing, but no one seemed to think there was anything odd about what I had said.

This was a privileged moment in my life because although no one thought I was a native resident, everyone knew me well and knew exactly what I was doing. I was not of the village, but over years of sharing and collaborating, and also disagreeing and negotiating, I had become a part of the village. And I was part of the village as myself, not as a mysterious scientist or a foreign expert or a government representative, but as a known quantity.

This opportunity was due neither to my ethnographic skills nor to my good intentions, but to my good fortune in being able to work at the same site and with the same community for many years. The factor that trumps even willingness to engage with the public and respect for multiple uses of the material record of the past, is copious amounts of time observing and being observed by various public audiences. In the places where I have worked it has proved to be more effective to let people see what I am doing and participate in it than to talk about it. But collaboration takes much more time than public lectures, and the results accumulate too slowly and unevenly to be feasible for most research programmes, especially in archaeology where funding agencies often resist paying for any attention to living people. Fortunately, applied anthropologists have some established strategies for developing intersubjectivity which can speed up this process.

While academic anthropologists are busy reinventing an applied anthropology with postmodern credentials, I think archaeologists will find that the original low-status construction of the field serves them just fine, and PAR has a long heritage in social science. We do not need a holistic godlike view of an entire culture to do our work; we need to develop strategies for successfully providing the exchange of information and learning to collaborate. The point of PAR is that it is structured so that neophytes can do it, but flexible so the outcome is not predetermined. Unlike an academic ethnography, PAR requires the archaeologist to have a defined goal that he or she is honest about and requires him or her to listen and learn in order to reach that goal — or to change it. Fundamental to this approach is not the desire to be ‘nice’ but the requirement to be respectful, and while people participating in a project together will have goals, the PAR framework is explicitly designed to promote the discovery and testing of unforeseen solutions.

Essentially Participatory Action Research (PAR) is research which involves all relevant parties in actively examining together current action (which they experience as problematic) in order to change and improve it. They do this by critically reflecting on the historical, political, cultural, economic, geographic and other contexts which make sense of

... participatory action research is not just research which we hope will be followed by action! It is action which is researched, changed and re-researched, within the research process by participants. Nor is it simply an exotic variant of consultation. Instead, it aims to be active co-research, by and for those to be helped. Nor can it be used by one group of people to get another group of people to do what is thought best for them - whether that is to implement a central policy or an organisational or service change. Instead it tries to be a genuinely democratic or non-coercive process whereby those to be helped, determine the purposes and outcomes of their own inquiry... Essentially participatory action research is research which involves all relevant parties in actively examining together current action (which they experience as problematic) in order to change and improve it. They do this by critically reflecting on the historical, political, cultural, economic, geographic and other contexts which make sense of it. (Wadsworth, 1998)

The important factor left out of the passive concept of ethnography that is reflected in PAR is that while learning about other people, the ethnographer is also sharing whatever information and ideas he or she has that may be of use. My favourite examples of this strategy come from Bentley (1992, 2000), who worked with a group of subsistence farmers in Honduras on crop pests. Bentley gathered interested participants at the Zamarano extension college for long enough to explain scientific information about the life cycles of the insects that were affecting yield. A year later, the farmers returned to Zamarano and taught Bentley how they had used their new information to reduce predation on their food supply. Bentley used his expertise to lend a hand without presenting himself as the authority on how to solve the problem. The object of PAR in archaeology is similarly to develop collaborative strategies and anticipate the consequences of particular decisions that can be used to solve problems related to research and management in sustainable ways.

## PAR in Kyrgyzstan

The space between the construction of identities through heritage and the repercussions of identity in political context is where archaeologists may sometimes be able to promote collaborative strategies, in order to try to pre-empt the violence and site destruction that are so often fuelled by the global gaze, focused on an objectified world heritage. Since it is cultural and not scientific or absolute value that is being preserved and displayed, people from the various groups that consider a particular heritage site culturally important need a chance to consider what should be done and how it can best be accomplished. Where possible, information exchange and collaboration among competing as well as among consonant interests should begin before the community in question has its heritage preserved by foreign intervention, displayed on the world stage, and auctioned in the global marketplace.

I began to be personally concerned about the political ramifications of world heritage recognition when I first visited Kyrgyzstan in 2004. Since archaeology so easily becomes the target of destruction and a tool of violent political action, I began to wonder if it might be possible to 'wag the dog'; that is, to get local people and various potential competitors who are involved in the globalization of ethnic, social, and national identities, to think about heritage in constructive ways before serious conflicts get started. At least if people have information about the repercussions of

the decisions they make about how to handle their material past before they make them, they can better prepare for the consequences.

International aid institutions regard preservation as a subfield of economic development, but fail to acknowledge that one group's heritage may be the foundation for another group's oppression. The idea that heritage belongs to 'all mankind' (UNESCO, 2009) and lies outside history, beyond modern political boundaries and apart from local identities, is one of those abstract principles that lead adherents to believe they are not accountable for the temporal problems they create. The bombing of the Buddhas of Bamiyan provides a graphic example of how emphasis on global significance motivated local destruction. In Kyrgyzstan, where Islamic identity is burgeoning, UNESCO is busy reconstructing two Buddhist temples, apparently oblivious to the potential for history to repeat itself.

Furthermore, economic development that promotes ancient monuments for reasons that do not resonate locally is unlikely to succeed, since it amounts to just the sort of top-down strategy that applied anthropologists warn against. Perhaps worst of all, due to its long-term consequences, is when people are proffered a heritage-based identity as part of an 'economic stimulus' package, and left to negotiate the difficult terrain between their culture and the business of global tourism. The international market for traditionalism and authenticity buttressed by this type of tourist development, framed as respect for incommensurable values, has some of the same consequences as unregulated labour practices. People with no options are given the option to 'choose' to exploit themselves. Wealthy visitors are offered a 'taste' of local culture without being made aware of the bitter economic privation that so often enforces traditionalism. Poverty becomes sanctified as 'authentic' (Wilk, 1991, 1999; Pyburn, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c).

Because archaeology and global heritage have such potentially negative consequences, it is essential that research and preservation issues are brought to the attention of stakeholders so that they know what their stakes are. Archaeologists have information that other stakeholders need, and people outside the academy and global preservation institutions have information that archaeologists and the likes of UNESCO must have to behave responsibly.

My ruminations about these issues have progressed as a result of an unexpected visit to Kyrgyzstan in 2004, during which I was surprised to be told that there is no real archaeological heritage in Kyrgyzstan, since nomads didn't leave monumental architecture. Although there is a well-established concept of what UNESCO calls 'intangible heritage' in the form of traditional epic poetry, resources for the management of archaeological materials (which are actually quite plentiful) are almost non-existent. There is no public discussion about site significance, while an interest in the promotion of tourism is developing rapidly. The correlation of these two factors is a situation I consider dangerous on several levels. Markets for artefacts are underdeveloped but have the potential to explode, along with tourism. Interest in a non-Soviet heritage and in practices associated with ethnicity has begun to rise. The most dramatic of the latter is the unfortunate resurgence of bride kidnapping, forbidden under Soviet rule, which has the advantage of being a globally stigmatized practice, making it a powerful identity marker on the world stage.

In this social context I predicted that archaeological sites would rapidly begin to appear as national symbols; Kyrgyzstan occupies territory once known as the Silk

Road, and which supported a magnificent variety of cultures with concomitant monuments and material signatures. Today, villages are nestled in valleys strewn with ancient burial mounds and dotted with the remains of Buddhist, Muslim, Christian and various other cosmologies. Local communities are aware of the archaeologists' work, and are slightly interested, but people do not loot to any significant extent, since there is no local access to the antiquities market.

Kyrgyzstan and neighbouring Uzbekistan have begun to experience heightened political tension resulting in part from the reification of arbitrary Soviet political boundaries laid down by Stalin to create the Central Asian Republics. Of course the interests of the US, Russia and China play no small part in this tension. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan encompass people with the same and closely related histories, but the sense of commonality that once existed is eroding. Recent political events in Uzbekistan drove a number of Uzbek citizens into Kyrgyzstan where many have relatives. The refugees, whose departure infuriated Uzbek officials, were put in an internment camp in Kyrgyzstan where they were characterized by the Uzbek media (which reaches across the border) as dangerous terrorists. Local Kyrgyz residents complained bitterly about their unwanted guests until a group of leaders was taken on a visit into the camp, which resulted in immediate recognition of common experiences and interests and led to family visits and to the voluntary contribution of food to the refugees. The incident suggests that the window of opportunity to re-establish Kyrgyz–Uzbek cordiality is not quite shut, but it is closing.

### **Forming a community partnership**

To address what seemed to me to be an emergent political conflict likely to heighten interest in heritage identity, I devised a plan to encourage a few small villages in Kyrgyzstan to create community presentations that consist of their own photos and maps of local resources (Chapin and Threlkeld, 2001). My idea is that talking about history and heritage and offering information about how globalization could affect Kyrgyzstan would be a good thing for an archaeologist to do, so I designed a project with three goals:

1. Encourage people who speak different languages (including Kyrgyz and Uzbek) to talk to each other about their heritage(s). Scholars will contribute to the conversation with information about historical and archaeological commonalities and differences.

To attempt this, over the course of the last three years, I have spoken to multinational academics (including historians, anthropologists, ethnographers, and archaeologists), and politicians, diplomats, museum curators and directors, public school teachers, graduate and undergraduate students, tour company operators and tour guides, hotel and inn proprietors, village leaders and professional herders. From these meetings I have invited 12 Kyrgyz citizens from different walks of life but all with a particular passion for archaeology and Kyrgyz heritage, to a workshop to discuss their interests, meet with various types of cultural experts, develop educational materials, and consider funding opportunities if they should choose to become a task group. That is, should they settle on a viable task and identify a group that wishes to pursue it.

2. Inform Kyrgyz workshop participants about some of the ways other people have dealt with the problems related to heritage and identity they may face as Kyrgyzstan globalizes.

To accomplish this, I invited people who have already experienced the full impact of globalization, including imposed top-down development, political identity management, and international implementation of archaeological research and heritage reconstruction, to describe their experience. Specifically, I arranged for Native American consultants of several nations to meet with the Kyrgyz delegation. Urban Kyrgyz citizens, including tour guides and museum curators, believe that ancient Kyrgyz people were nomads, who left negligible archaeology. In reality, the country is dotted with monuments which, unfortunately, are progressively identified as Uzbek and not Kyrgyz, and therefore research and UNESCO protection have been discouraged. But Kyrgyz nomads also left a rich legacy of burial mounds, stele (a.k.a. Balbals), and petroglyphs. Indigenous consultants from the Ziibiwing Cultural Center of the Ashanabi have been invited to speak about their experience of living in the shadow of material culture attributed to other people's ancestors, and about their own community museum which highlights petroglyphs.

3. Kyrgyz citizens with various perspectives and experiences will be invited to suggest what aspects of Kyrgyz pasts should be promoted within and outside their country.

To approach this goal, I have arranged for the 12 members of the Kyrgyz workshop to be offered information and assistance from professional educators and pedagogical specialists on the ramifications of different choices and techniques for meeting learning goals they devise for different populations. They will also have the opportunity to shape and contribute to a college level, online Central Asian archaeology course being prepared for addition to the MATRIX website, which is designed to support archaeologists who need to teach archaeological skills, considerations and subject areas that were not part of their own academic training (<<http://www.indiana.edu/~arch/saa/matrix>>). Should they choose to form or create a task group, the next step will be up to them. I hope it will include an interest in archaeology and the formulation of some research questions that an archaeologist, perhaps me, will be invited to investigate.

Since I wrote the first draft of this paper the Kyrgyz delegation has visited the United States and consulted with a variety of cultural specialists. It is too soon to evaluate the significance of this trip, but several interesting things occurred. Kyrgyz archaeologists spoke enthusiastically to the group about the wealth and variety of Kyrgyz archaeological sites, and non-specialists in the group showed surprise but also interest in this information. The possibility of forming a taskforce on the development of community museums came up several times. The trip has been highly publicized in Kyrgyz national media, and comments about what was learned about heritage management from consulting with Ojibwe cultural specialists suggest a new interest in community museums is forming amongst the participants. Towards the end of the trip, during a discussion of what might be the best way to organize the final workshop, Kyrgyz participants forgot me altogether; for the first time no

one thought about translating to allow me into the conversation. After a lengthy discussion, my Kyrgyz colleagues invited me to join *their* next workshop.

## The horizon

From my perspective, ethnographic knowledge is the result of sharing information rather than simply extracting it from a community to which the ethnographer does not belong. Respecting the people who will be influenced by archaeological research does not amount to learning their habits and language well enough to coax them into supporting what the archaeologist wants to do. The archaeologist does indeed need to know the people interested in her work, but the interested people also need a chance to know the archaeologist, and her culture. Arranging for these processes to happen in tandem is not going to result in the ethnographic excavation Radcliffe-Brown accomplished in the Andaman Islands, but archaeologists need more breadth than depth in their ethnography and for our purposes it is as important to be known as to know.

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